THE QUESTION OF THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY

The political confusion of this period is illustrated by the controversy over convocation of a Constituent Assembly—the ultimate aim of the liberation movement in Russia since the 1870's. The idea was revived in 1905 and accepted by the first Provisional Government, which had pledged itself to make every effort in its power for prompt convocation of a democratically elected Assembly that would assume full power over the nation. Very soon, however, the conservative elements, represented by the Cadets, discovered that under prevailing conditions they were not likely to get enough votes to win even a few seats in the Assembly. Believing the nation would elect a "better" Assembly if elections were postponed until the storm of the revolution blew over, they made such postponement the main objective of their policy. Their strongest argument was that national elections should not be held until local administration was firmly established and had had time to prepare the lists of voters and until each citizen had had an opportunity to see that his name was included in these lists.

In the beginning, the leaders of the Soviet were not seriously interested in this issue, believing it not very important whether the Constituent Assembly convened three months sooner or later. Thus the Cadets succeeded in persuading the eighty-member Special Committee appointed by the government to proceed slowly and cautiously in formulating the electoral law. When, during the negotiations about the first coalition in June, the Soviet demanded the convocation of the Constituent Assembly at an earlier date, Prince Lvov remarked pointedly that no less than two months had been lost through the fault of the Soviet, which had failed to reply to the questions raised by the Special Committee and to send its representatives to it.

By that time, however, the Soviet had realized the danger of a further delay. After a serious clash with the chairman of the Special Committee, the spokesman of the Soviet obtained a pledge from the Coalition Government that elections would be completed by September 30 and the Constituent Assembly convened on October 3. The Cadets, however, resumed their campaign for postponement. The local administration, they argued, needed more time to draw up voters' lists; there was not enough paper for the sealed envelopes required for secret balloting. At the same time they maintained there need be no hurry since the Assembly would not make much change in the situation.

In this psychological climate, the Cabinet quietly postponed the

